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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [AU](#)  
SUBJECT: AUSTRIA: INTEGRATION PLAN SETS NEW REQUIREMENTS FOR  
IMMIGRANTS, WHILE PROMISING SUPPORT

REF: 09 Vienna 1593

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[¶1.](#) (U) Summary: The Austrian Cabinet on January 19 adopted an "action plan" on integration that requires many immigrants to learn German before entering the country and enhances language requirements for legal residents already living in Austria. The plan also aims to combat discrimination and help immigrants gain access to the labor market. The text is vague in many areas and parliament will have to pass legislation before it can be implemented. End Summary.

#### GOA Adopts Plan

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[¶2.](#) (U) When Interior Minister Fekter (OVP) first presented the integration plan in December (reftel), SPO leaders refused to adopt it at a cabinet meeting, arguing that it lacked details and had not been vetted. Nevertheless, the SPO on January 19 approved a nearly identical version of the plan after adding broad language on combating discrimination and prohibiting the exploitation of immigrant labor. The text is vague in a number of areas, and parliament will have to pass implementing legislation before it can be put into effect. Fekter has said she would like to see the process completed by the end of 2010.

#### Language Requirements Enhanced

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[¶3.](#) (U) The plan requires intending immigrants to pass a test demonstrating basic German-language knowledge in order to qualify for a visa. The tests will be administered at Austrian missions abroad; the GOA is hoping to rely on Germany's Goethe Institute facilities, located in 108 countries, to provide the necessary language courses. Chancellor Faymann has indicated that it may not be possible to apply the language requirement for immigrants from countries with no Goethe Institute facility.

[¶4.](#) (U) Certain applicants are exempt from the language requirement, including workers with essential skills, seasonal workers, and relatives of Austrian citizens. The requirement also does not apply to asylum seekers or EU citizens. It will mostly affect applicants planning to join family members who are legal residents in Austria.

[¶5.](#) (U) The plan would also strengthen the language requirements for legal residents already living in Austria. Currently, legal residents must take 300 hours of German lessons per year to maintain their status; this will now be doubled to 600 hours.

#### Labor Market Access

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[¶6.](#) (U) Fekter maintains that the language requirement will ensure that immigrants are qualified to enter the labor market. At the same time, the plan aims to ease access to the labor market for

family reunification immigrants. Currently, such immigrants are prohibited from working during their first year of residence in Austria. The plan calls for this policy to be revised, though it's not clear whether the work prohibition will be revoked or simply shortened.

¶17. (U) In another measure that Fekter maintained would improve access to the labor market, the plan stipulates that child support payments for children up to age 18 will be paid only on the condition that children are attending school or have demonstrated a willingness to participate in an apprenticeship program.

#### Rule of Law and Values

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¶18. (U) The document stresses that the cultural values of immigrants cannot be used to justify the violation of basic rights under Austrian law. In this context, the plan mentions the social participation of women, family violence, forced marriage, and genital mutilation.

#### Vague Promises of Support

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¶19. (U) At the insistence of the SPO, the new requirements for immigrants have been balanced with promises of greater support. But the language is vague. For example, the text calls for reforms that would make it easier for foreign students to work in Austria after earning degrees from Austrian universities. But it does not specify how this should be accomplished.

¶110. (U) It is also unclear how the GOA will fulfill other goals set out in the text, including:

-- Preventing "economic and social dumping" (i.e. the exploitation

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of immigrant labor) and black market labor.

-- Adopting "intensive measures" to combat racism, extremism, xenophobia, and discrimination against immigrants.

-- Increasing the number of immigrants in public service, particularly in law enforcement and the judiciary.

-- Improving public housing for immigrants.

#### Coordination Office

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¶111. (U) The GOA will create an office in the Interior Ministry to oversee implementation of the plan. The office will also be tasked with monitoring how well Austria is integrating immigrants, using indicators developed by academic experts, and recommending policies.

#### Comment: Implementation is Key

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¶112. (SBU) The stricter language requirements set out in the plan address a popular complaint about immigrants who are unable to speak German. By promising to fight discrimination and ease labor market access, the coalition parties are attempting to show that they will be tough on immigration without adopting the xenophobic Freedom Party line. The success of this effort will depend on how, and perhaps whether, the GOA manages to implement these ideas.

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